

**Appropriations Committee  
Health Subcommittee  
February 24, 2022**

**Public Hearing on:  
House Bill 5037 AAC the State Budget for the Biennium Ending June 30th, 2023  
(Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services)**

Good afternoon, Senator Osten, Representative Walker, Senator Miner, Representative France and members of the Appropriations Committee.

My name is Emily Morrison, I am a Putnam resident and the Director of Development at United Services, Inc. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on the state budget.

United Services is the Local Mental Health Authority for 21 towns in Northeastern Connecticut. We are a nonprofit organization providing more than 30 programs to our community, including Outpatient Mental Health, Substance Abuse Treatment, Family Programs, and Crisis Services.

I want to thank you for the 4% Cost of Living Adjustment for community nonprofits that you fought to include in last year's budget. I'm here today to ask you to honor the long-term plan to address underfunding of community nonprofits and fund services by \$461 million over five years – or an additional 8% in Fiscal Year 2023.

Demand for United Services programs has never been higher. The impacts of the pandemic on mental health cannot be overstated.

Our staff have now been working for 2 years with a community in crisis. Compounding these stressors is the low salaries our underfunded state contracts have forced our agency to provide.

As an agency, we are currently operating at about a 25% vacancy rate, as is most if not all of the other nonprofit service providers. Low wages are the major cause.

Vacancies lead to high caseloads for our remaining staff, and increased stress at an already stressful job. It also leads to a longer wait for services for our clients. And right now, our clients, the adults struggling in our region, are not in a position to be able to wait for services.

The Governor's proposed budget for the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services does not provide support to existing services and programs that are struggling, and frankly failing, to keep up with the demand. We urge the Appropriations Committee to fight for funding for these programs by implementing the 8% funding increase.

The increases for crisis services are important, and we appreciate those. But without an increase in funding for outpatient services, we do not have enough resources to help individuals as they come out of crisis. Without access to outpatient treatment, individuals remain in a cycle of crisis, continuing to use emergency department resources, or worse, police department resources.

Community nonprofit programs keep individuals out of the hospital or inpatient system, and even out of jail. They support individuals in living and working independently in the community, and they are critical for our community's mental health.

Please help us address the surge in individuals experiencing mental health crises with increases in funding to community non-profits.

Thank you for your time.